EXHIBIT 3
DATE 1/25/07
HB 7

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE MEAGHER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S REQUEST FOR FUNDS TO CONDUCT HYDROLOGIC STUDY OF THE UPPER SMITH RIVER WATERSHED

Chairman, Members of the Committee, for the Record, I am Jamie Doggett, presently chair of the Meagher County Commission and formerly a Meagher County Conservation District Supervisor. I am here today to request your support for the Hydrologic Study of the Upper Smith River Watershed proposed by the Meagher County Conservation District.

First, let me say how proud I am of my friends with the Conservation District. They have done admirable, positive things for the Meagher County ag producers and recreationists. They have tackled difficult issues by forming consensus groups bringing different interests together and finding better solutions. They have always believed that the best way to inform the public is to have reliable, adequate studies and fact based data. This is not the first study they have done in the Smith River Watershed and each new layer of data only makes the data before it that much more accurate and reliable. They continue to ask the important questions and try to find the best answers.

Smith River Watershed encompasses approximately 1.3 million acres in Meagher and Cascade Counties, in west-central Montana.

- the focus area of the hydrologic investigation will be the Upper Smith River Watershed approximately one million acres
- the watershed and the activities conducted within it directly affect the population of the Smith River Watershed, which is approximately 1,967 people.

The Smith River Watershed is an important recreational and agricultural area.

- Irrigation is the cornerstone of this area's agricultural economic well being.
- Largely in response to the lack of enough available surface water for irrigation, some irrigators have switched or proposed switching from flood to sprinkler irrigation and some have considered using ground water as a source of irrigation

water.

- The affect of these changes in irrigation practices on the hydrologic system and possible effects on stream flow is not well understood.

Tourism is also important to the economy of the area and the State of Montana.

- Over four thousand visitors, from all over the United States travel to the area annually to float and fish the nationally renowned Smith River.
- Due to the rivers popularity, floating on the Smith River is managed through a "by permit only" system.

During recent droughts, stream flow has not been sufficient to meet the needs of all irrigators and recreationists. Minimum stream flow for fish viability has not been met on several occasions.

In order to understand the interaction between ground-water and surface-water and the overall hydrologic system of the Smith River Watershed, so that future integrated water management planning may be realized, a complete scientific investigation is crucial. Sound, future water management decisions and public education cannot be accomplished without this scientific information.

The information from this study will benefit:

- agriculture
- fish and wildlife habitat
- associated outdoor based recreational activities
- the general public.

The decisions that will be made, as a result of this study, will benefit the people in the Smith River Watershed, the City of White Sulphur Springs, Meagher County and the State of Montana through increased understanding of our water resources and making informed water management decisions.

Without the completion of this hydrologic investigation:

- agencies, groups and individuals will continue to make water management decisions based on insufficient information and perception and/or emotions
- legal costs will continue to climb for individual property owners, organizations, and government entities regarding water use and water rights within the Smith River
- The Smith River Watershed's ground-water permitting process, through the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, will continue to be put on hold.
- the public will be poorly served without adequate, reliable information regarding water resources, from which to make informed decisions

There is a "crucial state need" to complete this project. Informed decisions and integrated water management planning, regarding the future of this public resource, cannot be made without scientific understanding.

This project's importance affects people in agriculture, people who recreate, people who work with natural resources and all water users. It is a critical necessity for the hydrologic study to occur. There is a crucial state need for this project to move forward as a guide to other Watersheds across the state.